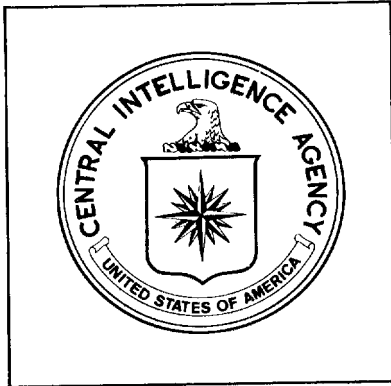


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## Middle East-Africa-South Asia

# STAFF NOTES

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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Malagasy Republic

*Referendum on Ratsiraka*

President Didier Ratsiraka seems likely to win a large, if unenthusiastic, vote of approval for his leftist regime in a referendum to be held on December 21. Malagasy voters will cast a single ballot in which they will say "yes" or "no" to Ratsiraka as president, to a new constitution, and to Ratsiraka's blueprint for a sweeping socialist revolution. An affirmative vote will formally establish a second republic; the country has been ruled by a series of military juntas since the ouster in 1972 of the first post-independence government. Ratsiraka heads a 9-man Supreme Revolutionary Council that assumed power in June.

Many Malagasy support Ratsiraka's socialist and nationalist goals but have reservations about some of his specific policies and his authoritarian approach. They see no alternative, however. Ratsiraka's conservative opponents have been weakened by the ban on political activity in effect since 1972, and they have been unable to mount a concerted campaign in favor of a "no" vote. Ratsiraka, for his part, has mobilized all the resources of the government to support a "yes" vote. Committees have been set up in the ministries to agitate for approval, and cabinet members have been sent out to make speeches throughout the country. The government-controlled media are focusing heavily on the campaign.

Ratsiraka's political position over the next few months may depend more on how he deals with immediate problems than on his success in winning the referendum. He is under mounting criticism because of his government's ineffectiveness in dealing with soaring prices, unemployment, and food shortages. His revolutionary program offers no ready solutions and in the short run may cause further economic decline.

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Ratsiraka also faces a difficult battle in imposing his socialist revolution on Malagasy society. He lacks organized political support of his own and owes his position mainly to his successful maneuvering among the few military and gendarmerie officers who wield significant power. Most Malagasy, passive and conservative by nature, do not understand his revolutionary socialist ideology and may resist the sacrifices and dislocations that are likely to flow from his attempt to impose a disciplined, centralized regime.

In the absence of a mass political organization, Ratsiraka must rely on the bureaucracy and the armed forces to carry out his program. Both were formed originally by the French to serve a colonial administration, and neither is suited for implementing a social revolution. Ratsiraka does not enjoy the solid support of the Malagasy military, but for now he does not appear to face a serious or concerted threat from that quarter.

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USSR-Angola

*Soviets Acknowledge Aid to Popular Movement*

The Soviet central press has, for the first time, indirectly admitted that both Moscow and Havana are providing military support to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

Earlier this month, *Pravda*, in reporting on a press conference held by President Nyerere in Brussels, cited the Tanzanian President's statement that he was "certain" the USSR was providing the MPLA with the "necessary arms" for its struggle against the "interventionists" from South Africa. In an accompanying commentary, *Pravda* stated that the Soviet Union, which stands "among the loyal friends" of the Angolan people and which was one of the first to welcome the birth of an independent regime, "is providing help and support to Angola during these difficult days."

Last weekend, moreover, the Soviet news agency Tass took the unusual step of publicizing MPLA leader Neto's expression of gratitude for Moscow's "all-round help" to the Angolan people. At the same time, *Pravda* provided the first hint seen thus far in the Soviet press that Cuba is furnishing substantial assistance to the MPLA. The party daily said that Cuba "always supported all national liberation movements in Africa, including the MPLA--the sole legitimate representative of the Angolan people."

Moscow's decision to make public, even in an unofficial way, its role in Angola follows some recent military and diplomatic victories by the MPLA.



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